(b) The reasons for pending was earlier due to non-holding of STD/PCO Allotment Committee meeting. The STD/PCO allotment policy has been revised. As a part of the revised policy, the STD/PCO allotment committees have been dissolved and STD/PCOs are allotted liberally to all the applicants as per their registration. All the pending applications are under process, as per the provisions of the liberalised policy. Sir, there is provision for out of turn allotment of the booths to certain categories of unemployed applicants such as war widows, handicapped, etc.

(c) 13 Nos. of STD/PCO booths have been allotted on out of turn basis since 1997 in Anisabad Telephone Exchange.

(d) and (e) Does not arise.

Group 'D' status to casual employees in Sultanpur District

†5370. SHRI SURYABHAN PATIL VAHADANE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Supreme Court has passed an order in respect of casual posted employees working in Department of Posts to the effect that all the employees working since 29th November, 1989 should be given Group 'D' temporary status;

(b) the number of such employees in Sultanpur district together with the number of employees to whom Group 'D' status has been given;

(c) whether Government are aware of the fact that certain employees in the district who are working since 1984 have not been given Group 'D' status and are being paid Rs. 797 per month only; and

(d) whether Government will issue instructions to appoint them on Group 'D' post immediately?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) In compliance with the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, a Scheme was drawn up by the Department of Posts. Under the Scheme temporary status would be conferred on the full-time casual labourers in employment as on 29.11.89 and who continued to be currently employed and rendered continuous service of atleast one year. During the year, they must have been engaged for a period of 240 days (206 days in the case of offices observing five days week). Subsequently, the Scheme was extended to those full time casual labourers who were engaged after 29.11.89 and up to 1.9.93 for grant of benefits under the Scheme. Full time casual labourers conferred with temporary status are treated at par with temporary Group 'D'

employees with effect from the date they complete three years of service in the newly acquired temporary status.

(b) The number of full time casual labourers in Sultanpur District (Uttar Pradesh) is 43. The number of such casual labourers given temporary Group 'D' status is 43.

(c) part time casual labourers in Sultanpur District have not been given temporary Group 'D' status since the Scheme is not applicable to part time casual labourers. They are being paid wages based on the number of hours of their engagement.

(d) Does not arise in view of reply of (a) and (c) above.

International Optical Fibre Network of VSNL

5371. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the VSNL has signed MoU with a U.S. company to participate in the International Optical Fibre Project;

(b) if so, the cities which will be beneficial in India out of that International Optical Fibre Network; and

(c) the commercial viability of the business plan, the cost implication and the design details of the International Optical Fibre Network?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The benefits of the International Optical Fibre Network will accrue to all the domestic telecom operators who will be connected to it.

(c) The commercial viability of the business plan is being worked out. The cost implications as mentioned in the non-binding MoU entered into by VSNL with M/s CTR group, is US $ 10 million. The international fibre project called "Project Oxygen" is a global optical fibre network comprising of 1,58,000 kms. of optic fiber cable with 101 terminal points in 74 countries. The minimum capacity available on every segment is 320 Gbps and going upto terabits separately on certain segments.

Opening of National Long Distance Services

5372. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the norms prescribed by Government for issuing licences to private